



# Minimum wage vs. full-serve gas

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Lt. Gov. Kim Guadagno stepped out of the shadows Wednesday with a blunt prediction about a proposal to raise New Jersey's minimum wage to \$15 an hour. If the state takes that step, she said, "you're pumping your own gas."

The theme wasn't surprising; Guadagno was addressing the New Jersey Gasoline-Convenience-Automotive Association. But this was savvy politicking, tying the populist minimum-wage hike idea to the state's overwhelming opposition to self-serve gas. Average New Jerseyans who support a higher minimum wage might think twice if it directly threatens something they cherish — full service at the pumps.

That may sound petty, but many voters will be weighing those competing concerns. That matters because Democratic lawmakers faced with the obstacle of Gov. Chris Christie's vetoes may take the minimum-wage question directly to voters next November, making the issue a centerpiece of next year's campaign for governor. Guadagno, who is eyeing her own gubernatorial run, merely offered a preview of likely campaign rhetoric, suggesting that gas stations won't be able to afford the number of low-wage workers they now employ. That would mean, at best, longer lines at fewer pumps — and growing pressure to allow self-service.

The attention given to Guadagno's comments was a bit jarring, considering her quiet and dutiful tenure as Christie's deputy. But it's also timely after the recent controversy about her supposed deal with the governor not to disagree with him publicly, an arrangement that came to light in the aftermath of Guadagno's criticism of the gas-tax deal that Christie approved.

Guadagno ultimately needs to step out on her own and distance herself from the highly unpopular governor. But on the minimum wage she and Christie appear to be on the same page, staunchly resisting increases. Aside from the self-serve gas twist, Guadagno was simply resorting to standard conservative talking points claiming any minimum-wage hike will be a job killer.

We're typically skeptical of such gloomy forecasts, and many studies over the years would challenge such predictions as well, but there's a difference this time. Bumping the minimum wage all the way to \$15 — from New Jersey's current \$8.38 — is dangerous. That's too much, too quickly, and businesses that would otherwise be able to absorb smaller hikes more seamlessly might truly be forced to cut positions. Advocates of the increase may believe that's a worthy tradeoff; if so, they should make that argument, not pretend that jobs won't be lost.

We can appreciate the motivations behind a \$15 minimum wage. But we also can't ignore unintended consequences. We believe a gradual rise to \$15 over several years would be more appropriate and effective, allowing businesses to adjust without major disruptions. A jump to \$12 an hour, for instance, and some time to study the impact should occur before making any commitment to an additional leap.

New Jersey should meaningfully raise the minimum wage. But a sudden jump to \$15 without understanding the potential full impact of the change isn't the responsible way to do it.